

Statement of the Honorable Fred Upton
Chairman, Committee on Energy & Commerce
March 22, 2012

Hearing on “Motor Vehicle Safety Provisions in House and Senate Highway Bills”

(As Prepared for Delivery)

I want to thank Chairman Bono Mack for calling this hearing, and to Vice-Chairman Blackburn for chairing this hearing in Chairman Bono Mack’s unavoidable absence. The Chairman remains in California to celebrate and memorialize the life of a friend and community leader who recently passed, and our thoughts and prayers are with her and of course the family.

First and foremost, I’d like to take a moment to commend both NHTSA and the automotive community for shepherding in what is unequivocally the safest period in automobile history. Thanks to the efforts of both manufacturers and the experts at NHTSA, in 2010 (the most recent numbers available), our communities saw the lowest overall number of fatalities since 1949. Our families and friends together traveled an estimated 3 trillion miles on the nation’s roads in 2010. Not only were there fewer fatalities than any year in the past six decades, but the rate of fatalities per vehicle miles traveled is the lowest since the first year of the automobile.

I’d also like to take a moment to congratulate the automobile industry on a significant milestone: the U.S. auto industry sold over 1 million units last month, an increase of 15.8 percent from February 2011. Based on last month’s numbers, the auto industry projects it will see annual sales exceed 15 million vehicles, the first time the industry projected such numbers since March 2008. More car sales mean more jobs at the auto plant, more jobs at the parts supplier, more jobs at the dealership, more jobs at the maintenance shop, and so on.

This is positive news but let us not lose sight of the fact that this is a fragile time for the industry and for the economy; we must be careful to balance new standards to account for the cost to manufacturers and consumers.

The fundamental question is whether the costs outweigh the benefits conveyed. With every new regulation we place on manufacturers, from safety to fuel efficiency, we increase the cost to consumers. We must be careful in balancing the both the benefits and costs of new standards versus what consumers can afford: safety shouldn’t be a luxury.

I’ve heard from a number of folks that provisions in the Senate bill are overly prescriptive and often at odds with the safety priorities identified by NHTSA. It is with these concerns in mind that I am eager to hear from our witnesses today on the state of automobile safety and the proposals contained in both the Senate and House bills. I’d like to thank you all for your time today.